The Biggest Laugh in Baseball

By BILLY EVANS

"WHY don't you play, if you're so good?" remarks a fan to Herman Schaefer.

"The team is strong enough without me," replies the comedian of baseball. The crowd laughs, Schaefer bows, and the fan subsides.

Herman Schaefer, the funniest man in baseball, has come back. American League fans missed him greatly. In former years the presence of Schaefer made many a dull, uninteresting game worth while. Schaefer spent the season of 1915 in the Federal League.

Ex-President Taft is one of the few baseball fans who do not appreciate Herman Schaefer. Mr. Taft favors silence from the coachers, and but very little of that. President Wilson, on the other hand, evidently gets a great deal of enjoyment out of Schaefer's antics. They tell this story of Schaefer's advent into the Federal League. Knowing he was popular with New York fandom, it was figured that he would be a good attraction with the Newark Club. He was called into conference with President Gilmore. After discussing the game in general, the conference narrowed down to a question of salary. Schaefer's demand was far in excess of the amount for which Gilmore thought he could be signed.

"Your figures are entirely too high," flashed Gilmore. "I understand that you are through as a player—that you are merely a comedian."

"Sure," replied Schaefer. "That is why I figured I would go so good in your league. You know, the public does not take it seriously."

With some presidents that would not have made a hit; but Mr. Gilmore has a sense of humor. The answer gave him a good laugh, and incidentally landed Schaefer a contract at his own figure, which Schaefer admits might have been a few dollars in excess of his worth.

Nothing Fazes Him

NO situation flusters Schaefer. An incident that he pulled at the expense of Slim Caldwell, star pitcher of the New York team several years ago, is still fresh in my memory. The score was 5 to 4 in favor of New York. The inning was the last half of the ninth, Washington had men on second and third, and two men were out. Caldwell purposely walked the next man, filling the bases, preferring to take a chance on the following batter. Manager Griffith spoiled the strategy by sending Schaefer to hit in the pinch. A base hit meant the ball game. In such a crisis most players would have forgotten all about the humorous side of life. Schaefer is one of the few exceptions. Selecting his bat, he walked toward the plate, then turned and faced the grandstand. He addressed the crowd much in this style:

"Ladies and gentlemen, I must offer an apology for Mr. Caldwell. He has forgotten I am still a member of the Washington team. I realize the game has been a long-drawn-out affair, that you are all anxious to get home, and I shall do my very best to send you on your way by hitting the first ball pitched to left field for a single. This hit should score two runs and win the game, unless the runner on second falls down and breaks a leg. Ushers, kindly open the exits."

The delay had done Caldwell no good. The speech had drawn a smile even from him. I was umpiring the ball game, and also waiting patiently for Herman to conclude his address of farewell. Turning to me at the conclusion of the speech, he said: "Let us resume the game." Stepping into the batter's box, he hit the first ball pitched squarely on the nose to left field for the cleanest kind of a single, both runners scoring.

It is easy to imagine the frame of mind that speech and that hit sent the crowd away in. Even the Washington players rushed from the bench to first base, where Schaefer had assumed an I-told-you-so pose, and carried him from the field.

One afternoon in Cleveland, just before the start of the game, Schaefer took the megaphone from the announcer, walked to the home plate, and, with several shouts for attention, quieted the audience. Then he cut loose:

"I had a dream last evening. I must relate it to you, for it concerns to-day's game. I regret to say that the score will be"—a slight hesitation on his part made the fans all the more curious—"7 to 3 in favor of Washington. Cleveland will get away to an early lead, Griffith will send Johnson to the rubber in the fourth, Washington will tie it up in the sixth, and the rest of the way it will be easy."

What Schaefer predicted is just what happened in that game, even to the slightest detail. Cleveland fans were amazed at the prophecy; some of them still talk about it. To the Cleveland fans present that day it was a remarkable incident. However, it didn't strike me in that light, for I had heard Schaefer make such a speech in every American League city, and Cleveland was the only one that he put it over, even to the result.

Seven or eight years ago, when Schaefer was a member of the Detroit team, the Tigers were playing a game in Cleveland. Cleveland got away to a big lead, and rain threatened. The Tigers resorted to every possible stunt for stalling, but I managed to get in five innings before the rain started. About the first of the sixth, it was raining hard—so hard, in fact, that the Tigers besought me to suspend play. I was a bit peeved, and decided it would not be a bad idea to force every one to play a few innings in the rain, as a sort of object lesson that might tend to eliminate dilatory tactics in the future.

How He Managed the Umpire

WHEN Detroit went to the field in the eighth inning, a peculiar sight greeted my eyes. Schaefer had bargained with a spectator for the loan of his rain-coat and umbrella. He had donned the coat, carried the raised umbrella in the right hand, while on the left he wore his fielding glove. The crowd had the laugh of the year. Incidentally, I decided it was my cue to call the game.

While Schaefer may not be the player he was five or six years ago, still I regard him as a most valuable asset to a ball club. He is a heady coacher. He is a big favorite with the fans. The players all like him. American League fans are sure to welcome him back.

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The movies have their Charley Chaplin, politics has its William Jennings Bryan, and baseball has its "Germany" Schaefer.

There are greater players—far—but few who bring more half dollars clinking into the till or keep the bleachers in a better humor.

Walt Mason Turns Nature Fakir

THE hatchery at Estes Park, 'mid Colorado's snow-capped hills, contains a trout which, men remark, should have the head-lines on the bills.

The superintendent, Thompson, stands, as kindly as a bard could wish; he holds a glass jar in his hands, and in the jar you see a fish. Its name is Sunbeam, and the name fits like the paper on the wall: it plays the optimistic game, and never has a grouch at all. Its age is seven; all those years Br'er Thompson made of it a friend, won its regard, allayed its fears, and taught it lessons without end.

It occupies a private trough, and if you speak of babbling streams, it seems to say to you, "Come off! This is the boudoir of my dreams!" And visitors, in eager herds, go there this Sunbeam fish to see; and Thompson then, in simple words, explains its finny history. But first he takes his jar of glass, and in the trough the jar is laid, and into it the fish will pass, all anxious thus to be displayed. A wild fish, if 'twere thus confined, would have three spasms and a fit, and thrash around till it was blind; but Sunbeam basks, and makes a hit.

And while the lecture's going on, it keeps itself on dress parade, and seems to say, "So help me John, I make all other fishes fade!" The lecture over now, the jar is placed back in the trough again, and Sunbeam, gleaming like a star, swims back to his accustomed den.

Says Mr. Thompson: "Fish have brains, and they'll respond to treatment kind, and if their teacher takes some pains, they'll show development of mind."

Photograph from Arthur Chapman.

Readers who visit Estes Park, Colorado, this summer will do us a favor by reporting by picture postal about this trained trout Rainbow. The story is that when Director Thompson wants to show off the fine coloring of the trout, he puts a glass tube under the water, whistles, and Rainbow swims in. We read once in a paper that Rainbow had died: if this be true, we will ask Professor Thompson to see that a copy of this poem is suitably engrossed and handed to the relatives of the deceased.

An Idea Worth $1

THERE are nine people in our family: myself, my wife, and our seven children, ranging from the kindergarten to the high-school age. The number of pairs of shoes that we use up in a year is astonishing—appalling.

One day some one happened to remark to me that the price of leather had gone up. I investigated, and found that a leather dealer in our town would pay a regular market price for anything made of leather. The price fluctuates with the market; at present it is five cents a pound and will probably go higher, owing to war conditions. I began saving our old shoes. I put a barrel for the purpose in the cellar, and as soon as a pair of shoes is worn out, into the barrel it goes. When a barrelful has accumulated, they are wrapped in burlap, weighed, and sent to the local leather dealer, with whom I have a regular arrangement.

One hundred pounds of old shoes, with the market at five cents a pound, means five dollars. It is surprising how quickly this mounts up.

I have since learned that in Brooklyn, New York, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul makes it a business to collect old shoes, sending poor children to a seaside home for a two weeks' summer vacation on the proceeds derived from their sale.

Photograph by Gertrude Brogman.

EDITOR'S NOTE: I have paid the writer of this $10 for his idea. Every week I will pay $10 for an idea that will make or save $1 for the readers of this magazine. Don't be afraid to send your discovery because it happens to be a little one; if it is novel enough to print—whether big or little—there will be a check for $10 for you in the next mail. Address your letters to the "$1 Idea Editor."